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#### Council members express confidence

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Several newly-appointed Umno supreme council members today expressed confidence that their views would be taken into account as it represents the aspirations of various groups like youths and non-governmental organisations.

They were pleasantly surprised at the frank and open deliberations during the council meeting yesterday, and promised to act as a "bridge" linking the younger generation to the party leadership.

"The atmosphere was democratic," said newly-appointed council member Azalina Othman, describing her impression of yesterday's three-hour meeting of the party's highest decision-making body in Ipoh.

"There is no issue whatsoever of the council being a dictatorship," she said.

Asked what a supreme council meeting was like, Azalina said she found it a gathering of thoughts from all levels, with the emphasis on unity.

"But mind you, the council is a very work-oriented meeting," she added, underscoring the often lengthy duration of council meetings which have been known to stretch more than five hours.

Her counterpart Azimi Daim admitted to some degree of hesitation at being in a meeting with senior party leaders known to be very serious and reserved in public - such as party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"The meeting was held in an atmosphere which I had not expected. It was very friendly, open and frank," he said, adding that the council deliberated on a vast array of issues concerning the party and national interests.

The council meeting yesterday discussed several issues ranging from the party's divisional elections next year to how to secure support from several groups which in the past were opposed to the party.

Azalina was asked whether the arrests of 53 Muslims by the Selangor Religious Affairs Department in several outlets serving alcohol in Petaling Jaya was discussed at the meeting.

"Let me put it this way - there are concerns over the matter in the council."

Both 36 years of age, Azalina and Azimi are the youngest of the council's 35 members.

Azalina, a practicing litigation lawyer, has a Masters in Law from the London School of Economics and diploma in Syariah.

Active in NGO work specialising in women's issues, she is also legal adviser to Hawa (Women's Affairs Committee) Selangor.

Azimi, a communications major, is Umno Youth information chief and heads the movement at the Kulim-Bandar Baru division.

Their relatively young age have led the Press to describe them as the "Youth and NGOs'" council representatives. Both admit this to be their primary responsibility.

"My appointment is on behalf of the younger generation and for women," said Azalina.

"I am not saying I can solve all their problems, but I can at least represent the council as a person who is on the ground in these matters," she added.

"The council expects our input on these issues," said Azimi, adding that "so that's where our responsibilities will lie."

Azalina said she realised that unlike many of her council counterparts, who held either elected or governmental positions to assist them in discharging party duties, she has none.

But she gave the assurance that her dedication to the party and to carry out her responsibilities as a council member was undeterred.

"I would never have taken this appointment just for the sake of being the `finishing touch on a cake' and I will never tolerate that."

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